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PACIFIC PETE,

THE PRINCE OF THE REVOLVER.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.

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PACIFIC PETE,

THE PRINCE OF THE REVOLVER.

CHAPTER I.

THE STAGE-DRIVER'S NEWS.

"It's a scan'alous fact!"

Making this assertion with an impressive solemnity, Ginger Dick replaced the tumbler of greenish glass upon the well-polished white-pine bar, passed a red, puffy hand across his bristling mustache, to which still clung drops of the amber-hued "pizon," and then cast a glance of quiet satisfaction around upon the eager faces of his audience.

"You ain't stuffin' us, old man?" at length ventured the barkeeper, as Ginger Dick evidently paused for an answer or an exclamation of some sort.

"Thar—I knowed it! I said the boys wouldn't b'lieve sech a thing—nur I don't blame ye much. It *does* sound kinder fishy, when a feller thinks how long Dutch Frank has been cock o' the road. But the little cuss called the turn on 'im *this* time."

"Oil up ag'in, Ginger, an' then le's have the *de*-tails."

Nowise loth, Ginger Dick helped himself liberally to the liquid poison; then, leaning at ease against the counter, he began his story with all the *gout* of a professional yarnspinner.

"We was on time, to a dot—"

"No need to tell that, Ginger," interrupted a little red-faced man, with well-ventilated clothing. "When was the 'Western Belle' anything else since *you* first took the ribbons?"

The little man glanced longingly toward the black bottle and wiped his thick lips suggestively, but Ginger Dick simply acknowledged the compliment with a grave nod, and resumed.

"We was on time, as I said afore. Thar was only four pilgrims—one outside an' three insides—when we stopped at Gabbert's fer grub. Thar was Vinegar Sol, Keno Dan and Jumpin' Jack. T'other was the stranger.

"You know the time-table 'lows forty-five minnits at Gabbert's, so the critters kin pick a bit. Wal, we grubbed—an then kem the fun. The strange pilgrim did it. The funniest galoot! You'd orter jest see him! All rigged up in stove-pipe hat, b'iled shirt and shiny boots—you could see to shave in 'em. Smelt louder'n a polecat—little sweeter, though. He was a high-toned snoozer, *you bet!* But you'll all sec fer yourselves, sence he 'lowed to locate in Windy Gap.

"After we'd done ett our grub, the next thing in course was a call on Dutch Frank, at the bar, fer a stomach-settler. Vinegar Sol he 'vited the stranger to jine—I reckon he thunk he'd ketched a sucker. We nominated whisky, an' while Sol was givin' a sentiment, the strange pilgrim axed fer a glass o' water. Dutch Frank opened his eyes, but filled the bill. Stranger he tuck an' made his grog half-an'-half—jest enough to spile both; too strong fer water an' too weak fer pizon.

"You tellers knowed how Dutch Frank was—mighty like gunpowder—easy to 'splode, an' when he *did* go off, somebody was mighty apt to git hurt. I looked fer a row, instanter. I saw Dutch's eye begin to snap, his ha'r to bristle, an' that big under lip to stick out—but you knowed how he was when rubbed ag'inst the grain, or anybody cast 'flections on his licker.

"Stranger didn't 'pear to notice nothin', but swallowed 'bout hafe of his pizon. Then he tuck the glass o' water an' walked to the door, pullin' a little white handled brush outen his pocket—somethin' like a young ha'r-brush—an' then, dog my cats, ef he didn't begin to wash an' scrub out his mouth, a-makin' the most owdacious faces—wuss'n a 'possum chawin' on a green persimmon! 'F he didn't, hope may die!"

At this stage of his story, Ginger Dick paused long enough to glance around upon the faces of his audience, and then, as if satisfied that they fully appreciated the enormity of the "strange pilgrim's" offense against the rules of common politeness, he took his "three fingers straight" before proceedin'.

"You know how quiet Dutch Frank had grown, sence he'd fit his way to the front rank an' stood cock o' the walk. Everybody knowed the stuff he was made of, an' so thar wasn't no need o' his showin' his teeth whenever a human sneezed cross-eyed at him, like thar used to was. But he couldn't stan' this, nohow. 'Twas bad enough to leave a glass hafe full, but fer a critter to go an' scrub his mouth out, to git shet of the taste—'twould 'a' made old Gabriel quit tootin' his horn an' use it fer a club—'twould *so!*"

"Dutch wasn't no angel—I reckon that's past 'sputin'. He lepped over the counter an' grabbed the stranger, like he would shake 'im to bits. But he didn't—no, not muchly. I don't rightly know what the pilgrim did, nur how he did

it, but he kinder straightened up—an' then Dutch Frank wa'n't thar no more! 'Steard, he lay under the bar, a-quiverin' all over jest like when you knock a hog on the head with an ax.

"The stranger? *Click—click!* an' thar he stood, leanin' ag'in't the door-post, a-squintin' at us over a pepper-box. I ain't much of a coward—ef I do say it myself—but at jest that peint I wished I was a mouse with a big knothole 'ithin easy reach—I did *so!*

"Is this a single-handed match, gentlemen, or air I to play a lone hand ag'in't the crowd?"

"The pilgrim said this, his voice soundin' clear, but low an' soft as a woman's, an' we could see the white teeth under the black ha'r on his upper lip, jest like he was a-laughin' at us. But Vinegar Sol he spoke out, like he was in a hurry:

"We pass, stranger—it's you an' Dutch Frank fer the pot."

"Good enough! I don't know what the fool has ag'in' me, but you take an' set him on his pins, an' then ef he wants any change fer the little love-tap I lent him, jest tell him I'm waitin' outside."

"A love-tap—that's what *he* called it! A good healthy mule kick wasn't a patchin'. Thar was a black lump on Dutch's throat big's a punkin, an' still a-swellin'!

"It tuck nigh a pint o' whisky to fetch the critter to. When he could fa'rly stand alone, he shuck us off. You should 'a' see him then! It made me creep clean down to my boots, an' I got ready to dodge. Not that he acted so wild, an' keerless like most men do. No, he was too mad fer that. His face, all but that black lump, was white as a dead critter's. His eyes looked like two holes, with a fire burnin' 'way back in 'em. Durned ef I didn't feel my skin crack an' shrivel when he looked at me!

"He looked as though he wanted to speak, but couldn't. He opened his mouth, but we couldn't make out nothin' but a deep growl like—more like a grizzly b'ar when his Ebenezer is riz than anythin' human. We onderstood what he wanted, an' Keno Dan spoke up.

"He said he'd be outside, ef you wanted any more. Best go round by the back way, fer he may be a-layin' fer ye."

"But Dutch wouldn't hear to reason. He drawed, an' made jest one jump out-doors into the open. Then kem the voice o' the stranger, an' we made out the words:

"Halt! thar—I've got the drop on ye, an' the first step you make, afore I'm done talkin', down ye go, a dead man!"

"We couldn't wait no longer, so out we lepped to see the fun. It's hard to b'lieve—I wouldn't 'a' b'lieved it myself ef I'd bin alone, but the boys kin sw'ar to it. Thar was Dutch Frank, standin' like a stone, his pistol half-raised, jest as though he was under a charm, like. The stranger was squatted

on a bucket, drawin' a bead on Dutch, lookin' jest as cool an' sweet as buttermilk. He nodded to us, as though to tell us to clear the track, so's to give 'em elbow-room, then spoke to Dutch:

" 'You pitched onto me, unprovoked, an' I reckon you kinder run ag'inst a snag. So fur we're even. Ef you want anything more, I'm the man fer your money. But I claim to be a gentleman. We have plenty of time; then le's do this job up in style. Are you 'greeable?'

" Dutch didn't *look* very 'greeable jest then—'minded me of a bull-dog what'd jest bin licked like thunder fer chawin' a hog—but he grunted out somethin', an' the stranger lowered his weepin. I looked fer Dutch to plug him—but he didn't. You never see'd sech a change in a human critter. He was cowed—an' by a little slender feller which looked like Dutch could take an' break in two 'crost his knee.

" 'Good enough! you ain't sech a fool as you look,' an' the stranger laughed out loud; soft an' clear, it sounded like music, 'most. 'Pick out one o' your fri'nds thar, an' tell him to step off the distance you prefer, an' ax him to give the word. Then you cut loose an' shoot your level best, fer I warn you that I mean business. When owdacious critters put their hands on me, the chances air that they git burnt—*bad!*'

" The words don't sound much now, when I speak 'em, but they cut like a knife from *his* lips. An' Jumpin' Jack he said in my ear that he'd go two to one that Dutch wouldn't pass out no more p'izon in *this* kentry. I b'lieve Frank hed some sech idee himself, he acted so queer—jest like a man in a dream. But he axed Vinegar Sol to mark off the distance—twenty paces—an' you know what a straddle-bugs *he* is. The stranger grinned a little, as he took up his posish; I reckon he thought Dutch was just a little mite skeered, but *you* know Dutch was good fer the size of a hat every twice at a hundred yards.

" Vinegar Sol gev the word, an' Dutch fired. I looked fer the pilgrim to drop; but he didn't. Thar he stood, jest like a rock, a-showin' his white teeth like he was a-laughin'. He hadn't even raised his pistol.

" 'Hold your place, thar, my man!' he called out, clear an' sharp as a whistle. 'You owe me a shot, but I want to light up, fust.'

" It sounds tough, boys, I know, but hope may die ef the durned galoot didn't pull out a see-gar an' strike a match, jest as cool as mush an' milk!"

" Ah, what're you givin' us?" sneeringly demanded a rough-looking, red-haired giant. "Take us fer sardines?"

" Look here, Big Tom," sharply replied Ginger Dick, "I'm tellin' this yarn. You may 'sider yourself bully o' this burg,

but you ain't got no call to crow over me. Whatever I say I kin back up in any way you durn please. *I* saw this little a'fair, an' so did three other men, any one on 'em as good or better men then you *dar'* be—"

At this juncture, when sharp words bade fair to culminate in still sharper arguments, according to the prevailing fashion, friends interposed to restore peace; not that they had any conscientious scruples against a little by-play between friends with bullets or steel, but they didn't care to lose the *finale* of Ginger Dick's story. A drink around healed all outward differences, and then the stage-driver resumed his narrative.

"I said the stranger lit a match, but he didn't light his see-gar jest then. Dutch Frank was jest *more'n* hot, to see how he was bein' played with, an' give a yell you could 'a' hearn ten mile as he lepped forward, a-shootin' at every jump. The stranger dropped the match, flung out his arm an' fired. Durned ef I b'lieve he *could* 'a' took aim, but Dutch dropped his weepin with a yell. The bullet had mashed his right hand all to pieces.

"The little feller cocked his pepper-box ag'in, but Dutch Frank had got his fill, an' turned tail, runnin' like a skeered jack-rabbit, a-yellin' at every jump.

"*'Halt!'* yelled the stranger ag'in. *'Ef you pass the sage-bush yonder, I'll plug ye!'*

"I don't reckon Dutch hearn him; anyway he couldn't hev understood what he said, fer he jest *more'n* humped himself. The sage-bush was over a hundred yards away, an' I'd 'a' bet long odds the little feller couldn't 'a' hit a runnin' mark that fur off. But he did. The-minnit Dutch reached the line, he pulled trigger, an' throwed his meat cold—tuck him chug in the middle o' his head.

"*'Gentlemen,'* he said, turning to us, *'gentlemen, air you satisfied? Ef not, now I've got my hand in, I'll be most happy to obleege any or all o' ye—one at a time.'*

"*'We was satisfied—'*most anybody 'd 'a' bin the same, a'ter seein' the grit an' the way he handled his pepper-box—an' we told him so, too. He jest showed his teeth a little an' bowed, an' then, while we were lookin' after what was left of Dutch Frank, he loaded his pistol an' finished lightin' his see-gar. Then he 'vited us to jine him in a drink, which we did. The pizon didn't taste *quite* as good as this, but we didn't keer about 'fusin' jest *then.*"

The patrons of the "Hole in the Wall" earnestly discussed the case in all its bearings, paying due attention to the black bottle, until the little red-faced man grew still more rosy, his eyes more fishy, and his tongue as nimble as those of his companions. Nor was the effect less noticeable upon Big Tom Noxon.

This man had a cheap-won reputation of being a veritable fire-eater, and had, in reality, been engaged in one or two street-fights since Windy Gap leaped into existence, through which he had passed creditably—as the times went. But his own tongue was his loudest herald.

"I'd like to see this wonderful critter o' your'n, Ginger Dick," he quoth, with a sounding oath. "I'll bet two to one that he couldn't run 'round *here* 'ithout gittin' picked up."

"Who'd do it?" quickly returned the stage-driver.

"You see me? I reckon I could chaw him right up—"

"I've got money that says you'd take water quicker'n Dutch Frank did. Put up or shut up!" and Ginger Dick produced a heavy buck-skin bag of gold-dust.

"But whar's your man—show me your man fust."

"I kin do that easy. I don't reckon he'll be hard to find. Kiver the dust, or own up that you crawfish!"

"Crawfish nothin'!" and Noxon drew out a handful of gold-pieces, which the bar-keeper quickly received, after weighing out an equal amount of the dust.

"I don't mind tellin' you now, Big Tom, that the strange pilgrim is in this 'ere burg, where he 'lows to locate. Anyhow, that's what he told me. You mind—you're to pick a fuss with him, chaw him up or make him take water—or the stakes are mine. No foolin'—Talk o' the devil! Thar comes the very cuss now!" added Ginger Dick, in a whisper.

The next moment a light footstep was heard, and then the "strange pilgrim" entered the Hole in the Wall.

CHAPTER II.

BEAUTY IN DISTRESS.

"My last match—and a mighty poor excuse for one, too. If it goes out—bah! The same old luck! Well, it's good-by smoke until the old man comes, I suppose."

With these words—a mixture of discontent and philosophic coolness—the young man resumed his recumbent attitude in the grateful shadow cast by the gnarled and twisted red-wood, yawning lazily.

His surroundings were not very romantic. Upon every hand rose the rocky hills, gray and forbidding, dotted here and there with a "fired" shrub, or covered with a scanty growth of shriveled grass and wild oats. Many of the rocks were fire-blackened. Wherever the pickax or long-handled

shovel could make an impression, there the dirt and gravel lay in unsightly heaps, surrounding many an ugly hole and pit. It was as though an army of gigantic moles or gophers had been at work. Not very romantic, certainly; and yet DICK'S POCKET had found birth in a halo of romance.

The story was a peculiar one, and a graver shade rested upon the young man's face as he glanced around and recalled the story as it had first met his ears, beside the cheering camp-fire, after a hard day's work in the gulch.

Little did he dream what a terrible interest that story was to have for him and his, in the time to come!

In the year '50, few men were more generally known throughout the gold mines than a tall, stately man who bore the singular *sobriquet*—"Gospel Dick." The title was honestly earned. Through the week he labored faithfully at gold-digging, and was accounted an unusually fortunate man. But when the Sabbath came, Gospel Dick substituted a Bible for a pick, and sought to interest his rough companions in the Divine Word. Though he reaped more ridicule than profit, he persisted, passing from place to place, until his name was familiar throughout the three grand gold regions of California: the Eastern Range, the Middle Placers, and the Valley Miners; and he won the respect of all, for they could but see that he was thoroughly in earnest and consistent in all his dealings.

One Sabbath afternoon he fairly electrified his rough hearers by a sermon of wonderful power and eloquence. And then he bade them farewell. He said that he had made a fortune by digging, and was about to return to his distant home, to rescue his family from want.

That was Gospel Dick's last sermon. When day dawned, he was found lifeless—well-nigh dead, bleeding from a dozen wounds; and his rich store of gold was gone.

The excitement was intense. Two men were lynched, on suspicion; but the gold was never found. Gospel Dick gradually recovered his strength, but his mind was a blank. He had only one idea: that of searching for his lost fortune.

One night he disappeared, and it was found that he had stolen a rifle, revolver and stout knife, together with the necessary ammunition. No one could afford time to search for him, and as the months passed on, Gospel Dick was almost forgotten. Then his memory was suddenly recalled.

Two prospectors came suddenly upon a strangely-impressive scene. In a basin-like valley lay two figures—that of a man and a huge cinnamon bear, locked in a grapple that even death had not separated. The fight must have been a furious and protracted one, for the ground was scarred and torn up for yards around.

A momentary gleam of pity for the unfortunate hunter—

then a wild yell of joy! The bodies were lying literally upon a golden bed—nuggets of almost pure gold had been torn from their resting-places and cast into the sunlight by the furiously trampling-feet. The death-struggle had revealed a wonderfully rich deposit of gold—a veritable “pocket.”

Hence came the name—Dick’s Pocket—for the unfortunate was indeed the mad preacher.

The tidings soon spread—but not before the two men had secured a rich fortune apiece. Miners flocked to the “rich find,” but numbers soon exhausted the golden store, though not before Windy Gap was built upon the nearest available piece of ground.

Another discovery had been made. *Gospel Dick had been shot with a rifle-bullet through the back of his skull.* Experts declared that the shot must have produced instant death. Who, then, was the murderer—the bear—or—?

The enigma had never been solved.

The young man was aroused from his reverie by the sound of a light footfall, and quickly raised his head; but the words that rose to his lips were never uttered. His eyes dilated with astonishment, and an expression of ludicrous wonder overspread his bronzed face.

In an attitude of startled grace, beside a fire-scarred boulder, stood a young woman, who had evidently just observed the young miner. In her hand was held a light, richly ornamented rifle, its muzzle thrown forward, her hand upon the lock.

“An angel in Dick’s Pocket!”

The ridiculous exclamation fell almost unconsciously from the miner’s lips, nor did he realize how odd it sounded until a clear, mellow laugh broke from the young woman. Then, flushing deeply, he sprung to his feet, and uncovered his head.

“Excuse me, lady—I thought I was dreaming. You came so silently, and the sight of a woman—”

“I can readily believe that, sir,” said the girl—for she seemed still in her teens—lowering her weapon, and smiling brightly; “I can readily believe that, from the way you started. Only—I don’t feel as though I was in anybody’s pocket.”

“Yet you are—in Dick’s Pocket,” retorted the young miner, joining in her laughter; and it was remarkable upon what an easy footing that blundering exclamation had put them.

“I believe I understand you now—and I’m glad to meet with some one who knows where I am, for I’ve been trying to find out that enigma this two hours.”

“You don’t mean that you have lost your way?”

“I fear so—but my friends must be near,” she quickly added, with a half-doubting glance into his face.

"I know that I am looking rather rough, just now, lady," replied the young man, his face flushing as he rightly interpreted her hesitation. "Still, I hope I am a gentleman. If I can aid you in any way, I shall be happy to do so, to the best of my ability. I am the last man in the world to thrust my service upon anybody."

"I believe you, sir," frankly replied the maiden, extending her little brown hand. "My hesitation was needless, feel assured—and yet, in this wild country, where so many lawless characters are to be met with, it was natural enough! I *do* need your assistance, for I must confess that I haven't the ghost of an idea of my whereabouts."

"I am pretty well acquainted with this section, and will gladly be your guide. You came from Windy Gap?"

"Some relation to Dick's Pocket? But seriously, I never heard the name before."

"I spoke of the town below. I supposed you were stopping there, as it is the only settlement within miles of this spot."

"No—we camped in a valley, father and I. There is a stream running through it, and just above us a good-sized waterfall. If you have ever been there, you must recollect the place. There is a large rock, with a tree growing upon it, that cuts the sheet of water in two parts. It stands right on the edge of the ledge over which the water leaps."

"I know the place—but you have wandered a good distance. The valley is five miles from here, in a direct line—twice that far by the route you must have come."

"I am a good walker, and wandered a good distance before I realized that I was lost. Then I ran a good deal—"

"In just the contrary direction, naturally—one always does," laughed the young miner. "Well, it was a fortunate mistake for me—no, don't misunderstand me," he added, hastily. "I am essentially a home body, was brought up with two sisters and innumerable girl cousins. Yet for nearly two years that I have been at the mines, I have not set eyes upon a *lady*. Women have I seen, but none that could remind me of home—until to-day. Can you understand this feeling? Let me make a confession. Last year I was mining near fifty miles from here. I heard some of the men talking about a fair and beautiful lady who had just arrived at Windy Gap—the wife of the hotel-keeper. I left my work and tramped clean here, for nothing else but to look upon a woman's face once more. But I didn't stay an hour. The fine lady was a painted, bold-faced, loud-talking being. I left Windy Gap that night. But now—the sight of your face has put new life into me, and I feel like a new man. It is like a glimpse of home. But—you are not offended with me for speaking so bluntly?"

"No," frankly replied the maiden, extending her hand. "It is a compliment any one might be proud of—and I'm not afraid to trust you *now*."

"Thanks—I shall never give you cause to regret your confidence. But—I've become a perfect bore! May I introduce myself? Mark Austin, from St. Louis."

"And I'm Edna Brand. Since all the preliminaries are settled, and you are so kind, hadn't we better be starting? I fear father will grow uneasy."

"I am at your service, Miss Edna—or should I say *madam*?"

"No—I am not married."

"I'm glad of that!" impulsively exclaimed Mark.

"Why so?" quickly asked Edna, her cheek flushing slightly.

"That's a leading question," replied Austin, in a grave tone, which, however, was belied by the mischievous twinkle in his hazel eye; "and I might refuse to criminate myself. But you will not think me an impudent fellow, if—"

"I might—so we'd best keep on the safe side, and let the subject rest. You said there were two ways of reaching our camp; which one do you advise?"

Austin hesitated for a moment, which, after all, was only natural. While one trail was much the longer of the two, the other was more rugged and would offer more chances of assisting the progress of his fair acquaintance. The advantages were about evenly balanced, and so, like a true guide, he made an impartial statement of the facts.

"We will take the nearest trail, then," decided Edna.

"Very good—allow me," and Mark took possession of the light rifle. "You will find it difficult traveling in places, and may need the use of both your hands."

"Or rather," laughed Edna, with a mischievous glance, "you are afraid we may meet somebody and prefer to carry the rifle, lest they think you a captive to my bow and spear."

"There's many a true word spoken in jest, and this plaything is not your most effective weapon—"

"Bosh! excuse me, but really I couldn't help it. If you could only have seen your face then, as you uttered that flowery speech. It looked as though you hadn't a friend in the world, instead of having found a new one to-day. But, a truce to this nonsense, or we'll get to quarreling, and then I fear I'd find myself minus a guide. Come, now we have a bit of fair ground before us, tell me something about yourself. Is not that the rule when friends meet?"

"Then we are to be friends—real friends?"

"I trust so—for to-day, at least."

"No longer than to-day?" and there was genuine regret in the young miner's tone.

"It may be so—I fear it will. You will not misunderstand me. I never knew but one friend, in whom I could confide

my little pleasures and disappointments; and she is dead now. I believe you would be a true, faithful friend, but it is not likely that we will ever meet again. I am here to-day—there to-morrow. I have no choice but my father's will, and he is never contented long in one place. We may resume our journey to-morrow."

"If you say that it will not be unpleasant to you, we *will* meet again, if not here, then wherever you may go. I have no ties to bind me to one place—"

"No—please forget what I said, it was very foolish, but mine has been a strange life, and no one has ever taught me to veil my real thoughts. We will part as good friends, but you must promise not to carry out your thought. Father is stern and suspicious toward all strangers—he has been deceived and wronged so often that he looks upon every unknown person as a secret enemy—and it would be very unpleasant for us all. You promise not to think of following us?"

"No—because I'd only break the pledge, and I won't even try to deceive you. You called me friend—I will prove myself worthy the name, if I live. But you mustn't ask such a promise of me. I like you—I want you to like me; but how can that come about if we are to part now, never again to meet?"

"I thought it had come about already," retorted Edna, with a little laugh, but her face was averted. "You say that you like me—I'm not ashamed to confess the same."

"But—I meant something more—"

"See! 'the jumping-off place!'" quickly interposed Edna, as they came upon an abrupt descent, almost precipice. "I'm afraid you overrated your skill as a guide."

"No—this is the only point where we can cross the canon. Allow me—" and Austin gently lowered her to a narrow ledge some six or seven feet below.

Scarcely had he released his grasp, when Edna uttered a faint cry and sprung along the ledge. At the same moment Mark heard a loud snort, followed by the peculiar *sniff* that is made by only one animal. Edna, in her sudden affright, had passed beyond his reach, else he might have drawn her up out of danger. Realizing this, he dropped boldly to the ledge, holding the rifle ready for use.

Squatting upon the narrow shelf of rock, scarce twenty feet distant, was a huge cinnamon bear, its wicked eyes glowing, its yellow fangs showing between the red, dripping lips.

"Run along the ledge, Edna—quick! I will keep him back."

He had no time for more, nor to see that he was obeyed. Angry at having its rest disturbed, the bear moved forward, growling fiercely and showing its teeth. A struggle, with such scant foothold, could scarce be otherwise than fatal; but the

young miner had no choice. He leveled his rifle and fired. But at the same instant the bear flung up its head, and instead of piercing its eye, the bullet merely shattered its lower jaw.

Austin dropped the rifle and drew his revolver. He only had time for one snap-shot, then the bear was upon him. Snarling fiercely, maddened with the pain of its double wound the brute made a furious stroke at the young miner, but fortunately overreached his aim. Struck with the stout forearm, instead of the terrible claws, Mark was flung against the perpendicular rock with stunning force. Yet he retained consciousness enough to cock and thrust his revolver forward until its muzzle was buried in the loose, shaggy hide. At the report, the beast gave a wild roar of pain, then its powerful arms closed upon the body of the miner in a terrible grip. With a gasping, gurgling cry, Mark flung himself heavily forward, and they fell over the ledge—down—down!

CHAPTER III.

"OLD BUSINESS."

"UP a stump—that's *me*! A critter that's follered so many false trails he's got so 'nation bad mixed up that he don't know his head from a hole in the ground—that's *me*, ag'in! Why cain't a feller lay down and go to sleep an' wake up to find things all onsnarled ready to his hand? Sugar in a rag! *wouldn't* that be gee-licious, though? F'r instance: here's me, little Old Business, in a minnit.

"I struck the Eastern Range, as they call it. I axed fer my man. Nobody knowed 'im—said so, anyhow. I scraped 'quaintance with everybody, his wife, cook an' poodle-dog. I drunk rivers o' rye, oceans o' Bourbon, chewed up hull cords o' black navy an' niggerhead; bugger-muggered with buggy Injuns, an' hugged thar squaws; ett rats an' dogs wi' China people; let big, black-mustached fellers turn my pockets outside in with their poker, monte—'you cain't tell which is the woman-keerd'—an' all sich little 'musements; did everythin' but chaw head-bugs an' horn-toads with Piutes. An' what'd I make by it? Echo sais in mournful 'cents—not a durned thing!

"Then I tuck in the Middle Placers. 'Twas the same thing thar, only more so. Nobody didn't know nothin'—'cept one feller. He knowed too pesky much. He give me d'rections. I follered 'em. Traipsed forty mile—clum a hill that was so high the moon used to bump ag'inst its top every time it tried

to pass by. Found the big rock—knocked—nobody didn't come. Knocked ag'in—same feller came what didn't come afore. Got mad—knocked the rock over. 'Twas all a dog-goned lie. Nobody'd never lived thar. That made me *red-hot*! Went back—chawed the feller's ear. Then tuck a fresh start.

"Struck the Valley Mines—an' hyar I am, a thousan' miles from bed rock, nigh as I kin tell. Not the fust sign o' a clue. Reckon I'll hev to try the moon next—mebbe he's tuck a v'y'ge thar—be jest my luck—'twould *so*!"

In a narrow valley—almost canon—was seated the man from whose lips, as if unconsciously, fell this peculiar soliloquy. Leaning against the perpendicular rock, clasping both knees with his hands, pulling at a black, stumpy clay pipe, in short, decisive whiffs, an expression of comical disgust rested upon the old man's features, in perfect keeping with his speech.

Of his figure, little could be told, he was so doubled up. A greasy skin cap—round as a ball—covered his head. From beneath it hung a shaggy mat of dingy gray hair, mingling with a long, heavy beard, white at the sides, but plentifully besprinkled in front with tobacco-juice. His eyes were rather small, but keen and bright as diamonds. His garb was a rude mixture of skin and woolen, dirty and greasy, patched and ragged. A short, heavy rifle leaned against his shoulder; a long knife and two revolvers were at his waist. The weapons at least had not been neglected, and were evidently well worth the care bestowed upon them.

Suddenly his attitude changed. His eyes dilated, his head was lifted and the pipe lay idly between his teeth. A faint murmur as of human voices in conversation came to his ears, though he was unable to distinguish the words.

Then came other sounds; a cry of terror, followed by another of warning; several shots, fierce growls and snarling cries; and then a dark mass shot swiftly before his eyes, falling upon the moss-covered rocks with a dull, sickening *thud*.

"Butter in a gourd! that's a nice way to git down-sta'rs! Hornets up a trowsers leg—let up thar, you overgrown galoot! Don't ye know better—won't, eh? Then hyar goes fer your meat-house—up to Green river!"

A man and bear, locked in a death-grapple, had fallen into the canon or defile, from the ledge above. Though the fall had been down full thirty feet, and the bear had been undermost when the bottom was reached, the shock appeared to have affected it but very slightly, if at all. Whirling over, it sought to tear the throat of its prey; but its under jaw was useless.

Springing forward, the hunter attacked the furious beast,